

Opening Address
Senator Charlie Shields, President Pro Tem
First Regular Session, 95th General Assembly
January 7, 2009

Lt. Governor Kinder, members of the Missouri Senate, our families, friends, and people of Missouri:

I thank the Senate for your confidence and the honor of leading this great institution. A special thanks to the senator from St. Clair and the senator from Cole, two colleagues that I have worked with my entire legislative career. I would also like to recognize my wife Brenda, who without her patience, support and most of all - really sound advice, I would not be before you today. Also with me are my sons, Brandt and Bryce, who it seems both grew up in this capitol, and my parents, Charles and Roselie Shields. I also want to recognize Judge Dan Kellogg. Judge Kellogg and I ran against each other for the Missouri House in 1992. We emerged from that campaign as friends - not something you see very often in today's political world. And I thank all my friends from St. Joseph who made the trip to our capitol to join us today.

Today, we begin this legislative session in what most would describe as "interesting times." Our state is in a difficult financial situation. The good news is that because of our decisions in the past, we are financially better off than most states. Despite that, our new governor, the House of Representatives and the Senate will be making difficult decisions in the next four and half months to meet our mandate of a balanced budget.

I believe our task at hand is to learn from our current challenges to create a plan to sustain economic prosperity and a high quality of life for Missourians for years to come. While our current financial situation creates difficult choices, it also creates opportunities. I was recently at a conference where David Holl, president and CEO of a Fortune 500 company, made this statement, "Never let a

good financial crisis go to waste – use it to make the difficult decisions that you refused to make when times were good.” Like Holl, we have the opportunity to use this crisis to make difficult decisions, but more importantly to focus on a long-term strategy to build the state Missourian’s want.

To accomplish this, we must first understand why we are in the situation we are in. Second, we must craft a vision of what Missouri can be. Third, we must create a road map of how we are going to get there. And last, we must constantly measure ourselves against our vision to know if we are on the right track. We must do all this, knowing that term limits will remove most of us before our vision is realized – that’s why it is equally as important that we commit to the process as much as we commit to the vision.

We all know the situation that Missouri is in: tough economic times, difficult problems with urban education, a disorganized system of higher education, children entering school not ready to learn, a budget that continues to grow despite our best efforts, and more and more Missourians without health insurance. So how did we get here? W. Edwards Deming, considered the father of the modern quality evolution, said this with regard to struggling businesses, “Your system is perfectly designed to give you the results you are getting.” To translate that to state government, all of our collective decisions of the past, Republican, Democrat, House, Senate, Executive Branch and the Courts have brought us to the place we are today. Our system has given us the results we are getting. In short, we are a \$23 billion organization without a long-term vision and operating without the benefit of a strategic plan.

So what is our vision of a better Missouri? Most would argue that it centers on economic prosperity and opportunity for our citizens. Almost all indicators of quality of life, educational opportunities, health status and the ability of one generation to succeed more than its previous generations evolve around economic opportunities for our citizens. Missouri ranks 33rd in the nation in median family income. In higher education, we rank 30th in the number

of our 25-34 year olds with a degree past high school. In health status, Missouri ranks 38th in the nation.

In all these rankings, Missouri is close to the middle of the pack of our nation's states. The question for us is, do we have to stay there? I say no. I ask everyone in this chamber, why can't we be a top-ten state in family income? Why can't our young people be among the most educated in our nation? Why can't our citizens have healthier lives, be more productive and live longer than those of our neighboring states? The truth is that we can, and that should be the vision upon which we build our strategic plan.

So how do we become a top-ten state in these indicators? It comes down to three strategies.

The first strategy is to continue the work of the legislature and our previous governor to make Missouri a place where businesses can grow and thrive. We must continue to develop the tools to help our existing businesses grow and to attract new businesses that will bring jobs to our citizens. Programs such as the Quality Jobs Act that have added thousands of jobs to our economy, new programs such as those we crafted to attract Bombardier - although we didn't get that company - we sent a message that Missouri is open for business. We must work to make sure our regulatory environment is responsible to our natural resources, but doesn't become such a burden that it drives jobs out of our state. We must continue to maintain our litigation and workers' compensation policy that is fair and keeps jobs in our borders. We must build on these policies and create new tools to attract the jobs of the future.

The second strategy is to bring more people into health coverage. Missouri businesses cannot continue to bear the cost of providing insurance to their employees and also pay for the costs of the uninsured through their premium payments. Our state government will move from one budget crisis to another if we do not get a handle on the growth of healthcare costs. Simply put, we must begin to make serious strides towards moving our state's 700,000

uninsured into coverage. This cannot be done simply by expanding MO HealthNet. It can only be accomplished by working with employers, hospitals, physicians, insurance companies and our federal government to blend funding streams and create market incentives to bring these citizens into a rational healthcare system.

Our third strategy should be to build an educated workforce for our future. The correlation between the economic prosperity of a state and the level of education of its workforce is indisputable. Our state will never succeed if we cannot increase the educational attainment of our citizens.

According to the Lumina Foundation for Education, the United States for years led the world as the most successful and prosperous nation because our people had typically been the most educated. Our nation now ranks 10th among industrialized nations in the percentage of young adults with college degrees.

While the U.S. ranks 10th in the world, Missouri ranks 30th in the nation behind our neighboring states: Kansas, Nebraska, Iowa, and Illinois. Of the nations ranked, Mexico is on the bottom of the list, yet we have 47 counties in Missouri that have education levels below Mexico for young adults.

As a strategy, we must move more of our young people into an education experience past high school if we are going to compete with our neighboring states. But more importantly, we must do this if we are going to compete with the rest of the world.

This strategy is not just a higher education strategy; our work must take place along the entire spectrum of education. In the next two days, ten children will be born in St. Joseph, Missouri. Almost all of them are born in the hospital where I work. If nothing changes and past statistics hold true, only one of those ten children born in my community will hold a bachelors degree by the time they reach age 25. The other nine will not all get lost in higher education, they will get lost along the way. Two will fail because they didn't enter kindergarten ready to learn. Two more will get lost somewhere in elementary school, maybe because

they don't have a parent who cares. Two will get lost in middle school, but will be promoted to high school because we will not know what else to do with them. We will lose two more in high school, because they simply won't see any reason to go to college. And of the last two that start college, one will drop out because they can't afford to continue. I said they are all born where I work, and often I walk down to the nursery just to look at them. The amazing thing is they all look like they have potential and at two days old, I can't pick the one out of ten that will succeed.

If we are to succeed in creating a more educated workforce, we must make changes in our education system from birth to higher education. Our early childhood education system needs to make sure every child enters school ready to learn by ensuring access to quality early childhood education and support for stay-at-home parents. Our elementary and secondary education system has to produce students who are capable of post-secondary education, and our higher education system has to realize the competition is not with each other, but with countries like India and China.

I have articulated a vision and the beginnings of a strategic plan to make Missouri and even better place to live, work and raise a family. However, the truth is that it can't be just my vision, it has to be a collective vision for our state, and it has to be implemented with a strategic plan, and it has to be constantly measured to know if we are on the right track. This work requires a dedicated group of individuals to help refine the vision, to help create the strategic plan, to help hold people accountable to make sure we reach our goal. I can think of no better group to do this important work than the 33 senators in front of me.

Each one of you represents 165,000 constituents who elected you to make a better Missouri. You come to this job with amazing backgrounds: lawyers, farmers, teachers, journalists, college professors, and business owners. You bring wisdom from every corner of this state. You are part of a body that is designed to sustain itself for centuries. And most of all, because I have had the

opportunity to work with each of you, I know you have dedicated your life to making this state a better place.

You are the senior board of directors for our state who can move us from a short-sighted, reactionary organization to one with vision and purpose. Our challenge as the Missouri Senate is: assess the situation we are in, develop the vision of where we want to be as a state, create and implement the plan for how we are going to reach our vision, and make sure we always measure ourselves against the goals and plans we have made. And we must do this in a process that can be sustained after we are gone from these chambers.

In conclusion, many will look at the times we are in and decide that our state is destined for failure and continued troubles. I look at these times and believe we have a unique opportunity to learn from the past and to set ourselves on a long-term plan to create a better state. To accomplish this, we must work closely with the House of Representatives and Governor-elect Nixon – our voters demand we work together and our success depends upon it.

Peter Drucker, the legendary management guru said, “The best way to predict the future is to create it.”

I look around this chamber and can’t think of 34 people who are more suited to create Missouri’s future.

Thank you.

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